

Texas Ruby Owens

Ruby Agnes “Texas Ruby” Owens. Country singer born in Wise County, Texas, on June 6, 1910, and died on March 3, 1963. She is buried at Franklin Cemetery in Franklin, Texas. Owens was raised in a musical family with nine sisters and two brothers. One of her brothers, Doie Hensley, went on to country music fame as “Tex” Owens, the radio cowboy. As a young girl, Ruby accompanied her father and brothers on a cattle drive to Fort Worth, Texas. One morning, as they sat waiting at one of the cattle buying centers, she and her brothers began singing some old cowboy songs to pass the time. During this impromptu sing-a-long, a crowd of cowboys and cattle buyers gathered around to listen. Soon, a radio station stock holder from Kansas City, who happened to be in the crowd, offered Owens her first spot on national radio.

Texas Ruby, as she came to be called, would be a pioneering figure among female performers within a mostly male-dominated country music industry. Labeled the “Sophie Tucker of the Feminine Folk Singers,” she sang mostly honky-tonk material in a strong, distinct voice and wrote many of her own songs. In 1937, at the Texas Centennial Celebration in Wise County, Texas, Owens met famous “trick fiddler,” Curly Fox (born Arnim LeRoy Fox.) The couple married that same year and formed a popular husband-and-wife team that performed on stage and radio throughout the country and eventually signed with Columbia Records.

From 1944 to 1948, the couple appeared frequently at the Grand Ole Opry and were regular stars of the nationally popular Saturday Night Grand Ole Opry. While performing at the Grand Ole Opry, the couple recorded such tunes as “You’ve Been Cheating on Me,” and “Ain’t You Sorry That You Lied.” During that same time period, Ruby released hit songs of her own with both Columbia Records and King Records. The couple moved to Houston, Texas, in 1948. For twelve years they continued to hone their act in hopes of someday performing on live television. In 1960, the couple got their chance when they moved to Los Angeles, California, to appear on the Town Hall Party Television Show. When they did not garner as much attention as they had hoped through this television appearance, the couple moved to Nashville, Tennessee, in 1963.

Unfortunately, by this time, Owens’s health was failing, so her husband often performed at the Grand Ole Opry alone. While in Nashville, the couple did manage to record a comeback album that was released on the Starday label. A few days after recording this final album, Owens apparently fell asleep while smoking a cigarette and burned to death in their mobile home, while her husband was performing at the Friday Night Grand Ole Opry. She was fifty-five years old. After her death, Columbia Records released a commemorative album entitled *Original Recordings of Texas Ruby and Curly Fox: A Memorial Tribute to Texas Ruby*.

Sandra George